

*Preparation to meet GOD in the Way of his
Judgments, the present Duty of CHRISTIANS.*

A

SERMON

Mary PREACH'D at Hackney

HACKNEY,

DECEMBER, 16. 1720.

Being the

Publick Fast.

By JOHN BARKER.

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1720.

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To my Friends at Hackney.



AVING taken the Liberty to publish the following Sermon, I think my self obliged to dedicate it to You, to whose especial Service I have devoted my self, and with whom, by the good Hand of God upon me, I have spent now six Years of my Life and Ministry with great Comfort, and, I hope, with some Success. The visible and apparent Seriousness with which you received it from the Pulpit, enclines me to think it will not be unacceptable to You from the Press; and I would hope, the Subject of it, being so loudly recommended to our Consideration at this Time by the Providence of God, may prevail with others also to think closely of the present Necessity of preparing to meet Him in the Way of His Judgments. I am heartily glad to hear from many, what I observ'd in our own Congregation, I mean, the great Solemnity with which our Publick Fast was kept, I hope it is a Token unto us for good, I am sure it will be so, if it be followed with sincere Repentance,

John Brinley

1651

The DEDICATION.

tance, and we continue to pursue the true Design of such a Day; but if we are only frightened to our Prayers, and have no Intention to part with our Sins, if our Goodness is only as the Morning Cloud, and early Dew, and People return again to those provoking Iniquities by Reason of which the Land miseries, we may justly fear, that God will not only threaten but strike, nay that lighter Strokes proving unsuccessful to humble and reform us; he will glorify himself amongst us by heavier and more dreadful Judgments.

I am a Witness how true a Concern You, my Beloved, have for the Honour of God, the Prosperity of your Country, and the Continuance of the Protestant Religion amongst us, I beseech you to strive with God by Prayer, and persevere herein at this Time, deal seriously also with your own Souls, and stand in the Posture of Servants, who wait for their Lord.

The many Obligations I am under to you, I take this Opportunity to acknowledge: A Minister so happy in his People, ought to endeavour to the utmost to be useful to them: The Service of your Souls both is, and shall be the Business and Pleasure of my Life: God Almighty encrease your Grace, and multiply his Blessings upon You, and Yours, and grant that both Minister and People may be made accepted in the Beloved!

I am your
much obliged, and
most affectionate Servant,

Hackney, Dec.
24. 1720.

JOHN BARKER.



AMOS IV. 12.

*Therefore thus will I do unto Thee,
O Israel: and because I will do
this unto Thee, prepare to meet
thy God, O Israel.*



THESE Words are an Expression of God's severe Resentment against a sinful People; they are intended to awaken their Conviction, and to intimate their Duty under the Notices of approaching Judgment. God was angry with *Israel*, and preparing to make them feel that He was so, and therefore sends them this Message by his Prophet. The Ten Tribes to whom it is directed were neither drawn to Repentance by God's Mercies, nor reclaim'd from Sin by his Judgments. *I have given you* (says He) *clearness*

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of Teeth, and want of Bread, I have smitten you with Blasting and Mildew, I have sent among you the Pestilence after the Manner of Egypt; I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom, &c. ---- yet have ye not returned unto Me saith the Lord; Therefore thus will I do unto Thee O Israel. q. d. ‘ I will go on to afflict you so long as you continue impenitent, the Judgments I have sent already, I will send over again, and add yet worse Things than these, except you repent; you may think and act as you please, but know, nothing shall satisfy me short of sincere Repentance, and speedy and thorough Reformation.

I have chosen these Words for the Subject of this Days Discourse, after many Thoughts about the present State of Things amongst us. I would by no means raise any groundless Fear, nor make, or encourage, unreasonable Complaint; far be it from me to overlook former Deliverances, or forget present Mercies. I would be as thankful as any Man for the Goodness of God to my native Country, and I own, I can cast my Eyes no where in all the World, and behold so happy a Nation as our own, and yet there are such Symptoms now upon Us, that I must needs say, *My Flesh trembleth for fear of God, and I am afraid of his Judgments.* If He be coming towards Us in a Way of Mercy 'twill be a grateful Surprize, if not in one of Judgment 'tis well, much better than our Sins deserve, and many good, and wise Men amongst us fear; if the Storm be already

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already broken, and the worst be past with Us, 'tis happy, but if these be only the Beginning of Sorrows, this Warning is so much the more proper; in short, whatsoever is in the Womb of Providence, it must needs be well to prepare for the worst.

To assist you in such Preparation, let me make and emprove the following Observation :

Doct. *It is the especial Duty of a professing People, under the Apprehension of approaching Punishment, to prepare to meet their offended GOD.*

In speaking to this Doctrine, I will venture.

I. To mention such Things as appear to me great Signs of approaching Punishment.

II. I will endeavour to shew how in such a Case, a professing People should prepare to meet their offended God.

I. The Signs of approaching Punishment are such as these.

i. *The general Corruption of Men's Minds and Manners.*

When a People whom God has bless'd with great Light, and singular Advantages, grow generally dissolute, licentious and profane, it is very provoking to God, and a great Sign of ap-

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proaching Misery. *Jerem. iii. 8.* Jerusalem (says the Prophet) *is ruin'd, and Judah is fallen, because their Tongue and their Doings are against the Lord to provoke the Eyes of his Glory.* Secret Sin is observed by Heaven with Displeasure, but when it is open and bare-fac'd, growing and abounding, it calls aloud for Vengeance, and threatens a speedy Punishment. *The Shew of their Countenance doth witness against them, and they declare their Sin as Sodom, they hide it not, wo unto their Soul for they have rewarded evil unto themselves,* *Isa. iii. 9.* When Vice spreads like an Infection, travels our Streets with an avowed Impudence, runs thro' the several Orders of Men, and it is thought a little Thing, because a common Practice, to swear, and be drunk, to lye, and deceive, to be covetous, or unclean, to make a Jest of Religion, and scoff at all that is sacred, just and good; Who can imagine that God will long endure this? *Shall I not visit saith the Lord for these things, shall not my Soul be avenged on such a Nation as this?* *Jer. v. 9.* *When Men cast out their Wickedness as a Fountain casteth out her Waters,* abundantly (i. e.) continually, and without ceasing. *Then be thou instructed O Jerusalem, lest my Soul depart from thee, lest I make thee desolate, a Land not inhabited.* *Jer. vi. 7. 8.* A Deluge of Sin if not followed with timely Repentance, and fervent Prayer, naturally, and almost necessarily ends in a Torrent of Misery.

2. *Unnatural Heats and Divisions.*

These have a bad Aspect both upon our civil and sacred Interests, and bode almost all that is ill to us consider'd either as Men, or Christians. Our Saviour long ago observ'd that *a Kingdom divided against itself cannot stand*, and it is equally applicable to every other Society. A dividing Spirit among Brethren is very unnatural, and indeed a sore Judgment. Private Interest is but an ill Principle to act upon, especially in Opposition to a more publick Good, but what then is private Revenge! Harmony and Concord only is the Strength and Beauty of Society, this can never be too much inculcated upon those who are Members one of another. That is a vile hand which designedly sows Discord among Brethren, whatsoever alienates Men's Affections from one another, and enrages their Passions one against another, weakens their Hands in Proportion, and exposes them to a common Enemy. They who being united, are their Neighbours Terror being effectually divided become their Scorn. Our Enemies have been long of Opinion that to divide Protestants is the only sure Way to subdue them; hence are they restless, and unwearied in those Attempts, and what with the Weakness of some, and the Passions and Lusts of others, they have too often found their Account in them. How often must we be told that the Gospel of Christ is a Gospel of Peace, that the Spirit of Christ is a Spirit of Holiness and Love, and that the sure Mark of a sincere Christian is universal Charity; on the contrary, if we are inflamed

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enflamed with party Zeal, continue to pull different Ways, and will sacrifice the Glory of God, and the publick Good to our own perverse Passions, all will be thrown into utter Confusion, *if ye bite and devour one another, take Heed, that ye be not consumed one of another, Gal. 5.*

15.

3. *The Abuse of eminent Mercies.*

Great Mercies abus'd into Occasions of Sin, and us'd as Weapons of Rebellion against the God who bestows them is very provoking: To despise the Riches of Divine Goodness is vile indeed; nothing raises Resentment higher, or stains a Man's Character with more indelible Infamy than gross Ingratitude. It is recorded to the perpetual Shame of *Israel*, that they provoked God at the Sea. Even at the red Sea; distinguishing Mercies are suited to raise the most tender, and generous Sentiments in the Mind, to overlook and despise these, therefore argues a very disobliging and perverse Spirit. How great Blessings are Liberty, Plenty and Peace, but should these be abus'd into Occasions of Debauchery, Pride and Luxury, nothing can be more provoking, *Deut. 32. 6, 11, 15, 23. Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish People and unwise, is he not thy Father, hath he not made thee and establish'd thee? Again, As an Eagle stirreth up her Nest, fluttereth over her Young, spreadeth abroad her Wings, taketh them, and beareth them on her Wings, so the Lord alone did lead his People, but Jeashurun waxed*

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waxed full, and kicked, they provoked him to jealousy with strange Gods, of the Rock that begat thee, thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee, and what was the Consequence of this Ingratitude? It follows, when the Lord saw it he abhorred them, I will hide my Face from them, I will heap Mischief upon them, I will spend mine Arrows upon them. Behold a Punishment equal to their Crime! When Matters come to this Pals, God may appeal to Heaven and Earth against such a People. Nothing deserves more heavy Strokes of Punishment, than a long Abuse of eminent distinguishing Mercy,

4. *Insensibility under remarkable Judgments.*

This is observed as the aggravated Guilt of *Israel*, in the Chapter before us, God had afflicted them with Famine, Pestilence and Fire, and yet they returned not unto him, they were become incorrigible, and seem'd determin'd rather to suffer than reform, now what can we suppose will follow such an unusual Degree of Wickedness! They who hear not when God speaks, are yet used to feel when he strikes, *in their Affliction they will seek me early.* Of all things this Temper is most to be dreaded, nothing looks more likely to end in utter Rejection and Ruin, than an incorrigible Temper. We in this Nation have Reason to make a close Application here, we have tasted largely of Divine Mercy, but this has not reform'd us, and now God has given us the Cup of Affliction; we are smitten as it were by an invisible Hand, and fal'n from high-rais'd

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Expectations to a low Estate ; the Pride of our Countenances is fal'n into a sudden Dejection, and we all see this potent, prosperous Nation now reeling and staggering under the Frowns of Providence : A sweeping Plague also, as it were, waits on the other Side the Water for God's Commission ; hitherto it is stayed there, as if Heaven was willing to try one Judgment first ; as if God would wait till he saw how these Things will operate with us. Our Sovereign has proclaimed this Fast principally on this Account, to deprecate so heavy a Judgment ; *O may it prove an acceptable Day to the Lord !* Attend, O our Souls, to the loud Voice of Providence ! Amos iii. 6, 7, 8. *Shall a Trumpet be blown in the City, and the People not be afraid ? Shall the Lion roar, and few or none hear and tremble ? Is there Evil in the City, and the Lord hath not done it ?* They are sad Things we feel already ; but if we are so violently addicted to sin, that there is no reclaiming us, worse Things than these will come upon us.

5. Neglect, or careless Performance of Religious Duties.

As nothing looks better upon a professing People than a regular, devout Observation of the instituted Worship of God ; so there is hardly a more threatening Symptom than a general Neglect, or visible Coldness and Indifference here. God has a jealous Eye upon his own Institutions ; and if these are corrupted, prostituted or neglected, the Lord will search out this, if we do not

sanctify God in his Worship, he will sanctify himself, and glorify himself. If we make no conscience of his Ordinances he will despise us, and if we observe them in a Way that he appoints not, he will despise them. *I hate, I despise your Feast Days, I will not smell in your solemn Assemblies: take away the Noise of your Songs, I will not bear the Melody of your Viols,* Amos, v. 21. Ceremonious Observances will never pass with God for instituted Worship, nor will his own Institutions be acceptable to him unless observed with an enlightened Mind, an obedient Will, a convinced Conscience, and devout Affections.

6. *The Departure of God.*

This is itself a sore Judgment, and entails upon a forsaken People, a complicated Misery, *woe to them when I depart from them,* Hos. ix. 12. God's Essential Presence departs from none of his Creatures; but so does sometimes his special and gracious one. His Presence of general Observation is every where, but that of powerful, and gracious Influence, may withdraw, and this I take to be the greatest Loss that can befall any People in this World, and the sorest Judgment either to particular Persons, or to Societies. That Day the Ark of the Lord was taken, the Sign of his gracious Presence with that People, all *Israel* fled before their Enemies, and Thirty Thousand fell by the Sword, 1 Sam. iv. 10, 11. King *Saul* that great Warriour, runs about in the utmost Confusion, 1 Sam. 28. 15, 16. saying, *I am sore distressed for the Philistines.*

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stines make War upon me, and God is departed from me. With what Passion does penitent David deprecate God's Departure, *cast me not away from thy Presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me!* The gracious Presence of God is our greatest Glory and Comfort, so long as we secure this it is not so much what we lose, or suffer: This, as it enriches our Mercies, and makes them doubly grateful; so it lessens our Afflictions, and makes the heaviest of them tolerable. God with us will keep Correction within Bounds and Measure, secure the Benefit of the Rod, and cause the Trial to issue well: The Furnace in this Case will prove a Refining, not a consuming Fire; But if God depart from us, we are undone to purpose; his Spirit will then no longer strive nor stay with us; his Word and Ordinances will remove with him; his Providence will no longer defend us, nor his *Comforts delight our Souls*; our civil and sacred Interests will both be destroy'd, the Foundations be out of Course; every Creature will arm itself against us, and all Things run into utter Confusion. O let all who have ever experienc'd the Presence of God in a Way of sensible Comfort, and special Benefit, deprecate his Departure; lament O our Souls after a departing God! Dread his wrathful, and passionately implore his gracious, Presence.

II. The Second Enquiry is, How should a threatened People prepare to meet an offended God?

This Enquiry is most important, because, to think of avoiding God is vain. *Adam*

Adam made a very mean Figure when he endeavoured to hide himself from his Maker, and found it a vain Attempt; whom God seeks he will find, whom he pursues he will be sure to overtake, his Eye pierces thro' the thickest Darkness, no Distance can remove us out of the Reach of his Hand, could we take the Wings of the Morning, we could not fly from him, and should we say, the Darkness shall cover us, even the Night shall be Light about us, Darkness and Light, are both alike to God, Psal. cxxxix.

To meet him, and endure his Wrath is impossible.

As well may the parched Stubble endure the devouring Flame, as sinful Men stand before God when he is angry: Can we stop the Course of Lightning, or hold the Wind in our Fists? No more can we bear Almighty Wrath: One Drop of pure unmixed Wrath will enrage the Conscience, and terrify the Soul beyond enduring, *while I suffer thy Terrors (says Heman) I am distracted*, Psal. lxxxviii. 15.

To meet God and contend with him is fatal.

The Wrath of a Creature may be withheld, and when we cannot escape by Stratagem, we may possibly overcome by Force, *but who knoweth the Power of God's Anger, according to thy Fear, so is thy Wrath*, one serious Thought of Omnipotent Wrath is enough to make the proudest Sinners stoop and tremble, what Confusion and Horror would seize our Souls, and fill our World, *should the Almighty whet his*

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glittering Sword, and bathe the same in Heaven.
Deut. xxxii. 31. Isa. xxxiv. 5.

We cannot meet God, and impeach his Righteousness, or justly plead we don't deserve his high Delight-pleasure.

How should Man be just with God, if he will contend, he cannot answer him one of a Thousand. If I speak of Strength, lo he is strong; and if of Judgment, who shall set me a Time to plead, Job ix. 3, 19. God will do no Man wrong, divine Threatnings are none of them arbitrary and partial, nor any executed Punishment undeserved, or excessive. God has a Witness in the breast of every Sinner that he is righteous. How often did he shew rebellious *Israel* that his Ways were equal! The Desert of Sin is the Wrath and Curse of God, *and if we say we have no Sin, we deceive ourselves.*

Nor can we meet him, and make Satisfaction to his offended Majesty, *which of us can redeem his Brother, or himself, or offer to God a Ransom for his Soul?* To satisfy violated Laws, glorify offended Attributes, and give to God a Recompence for innumerable Sins is to be done by none but the Son of God, the most costly Sacrifices, and passionate Pleadings of a wretched Sinner, will avail him nothing in a Way of Satisfaction, nothing avails here but the rich and precious Blood of a Redeemer, even Christ's Satisfaction had not been total and plenary, had he not been equal with God, hence that of the Prophet, *awake O Sword against the Man that is my Fellow,* Zech. xiii. 7.

And

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And yet *Israel* no doubt are directed how to prepare to meet God in such a Manner as, if possible, to prevent the Punishment threatned against them ; or, if that could not be, than to prepare to receive it. And hereupon it is proper to enquire,

i. How are we to prepare to meet an offended God, so as to turn away his Wrath from us.

The Expression which the Prophet repeats five Times over in this Chapter will furnish us with an Answer to this Enquiry, *yet have ye not returned unto me saith the Lord*. True Repentance is the only safe and comfortable Way in which to meet an offended God, then is God's Controversy like to cease with a backsliding People when they leave the Way of Sin, and return into that of Duty, *thus saith the Lord God to the house of Israel, seek ye me and ye shall live, Amos, v.4.*

Come then to God, in Order to prevent approaching Misery with a true Sense of Sin ; appear to understand what this is, and what it deserves. Sin is an Evil and a bitter Thing, provoking to the Eyes of God's Glory, an Affront to his just and equal Laws, a Dishonour and Contempt of the blessed Jesus, the Shame and Disgrace of the humane Nature, the Curse and Plague of the World, and the Bane of all good Order, and regular Society among Men : As ever therefore we expect God should be appeased, this must not be regarded in our Hearts, cherish'd in our Bosoms, roled as a sweet Morsel under our Tongues, no longer indulg'd, no more excus'd

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and palliated, but openly disavowed, and publickly abhor'd and detested.

Meet him likewise with solemn Humiliation and Prayer.

Ingenuous Acknowledgment of an Offence greatly affects a generous Mind. A disobedient Child has no such sure Way to a Parent's Heart, as by Tears and Supplication; nay, a Rebel, who throws down his Arms, and prostrates himself at the Feet of his Sovereign, may hope to obtain his pardon. Prayer has been seen to disarm (if I may be allow'd the Expression) almighty Vengeance, smooth the Frowns of Heaven, and scatter the Clouds of threatening Wrath. When God gives Opportunity to pray, and a Heart to improve it, it discovers an Intention of Mercy, and a Willingness to be reconciled. When his judicial Purposes are fix'd, and the irrevocable Decree gone forth, there is commonly, either no room for Intercession, or none found to make it. If there be a *Moses* to stand in the Breach, Prophets, and good Men, to assemble the Lord's People, and spread out their Hands unto Heaven, our Case is hopeful. That awful Prohibition *Jer. vii. 16.* has yet something encouraging in it, *Therefore pray not thou for this People, neither lift up Cry nor Prayer for them, for I will not bear thee;* q. d. ' Prophet, you know your Power ' with your God; shouldst thou pray, I should be ready to stop the Messengers of Wrath and Death, ' I wo'n't have you pray therefore at this Time ' because I wo'n't have the Uneasiness to deny ' your

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‘your Request.’ God is known to his People by the Title of *God hearing Prayer*, innumerable Promises are made to the faithful Discharge of this Duty ; it has been usual with good Souls, who have ascended to Heaven upon the Wings of Prayer, to bring down the tender Mercies of God from thence along with them ; and it is the successive Experience of every Generation of good Men, that it is not in vain to call upon God. When the Spirit of God quickens his People to Prayer, and enlarges them in it, they will probably obtain what they ask for others ; but if not that, they will however, at least deliver their own Souls.

Add now, a Readiness to part with every Thing which has given Occasion to the Controversy between God and us, Resolution to renew our Covenant, and revolt no more, and the Work is done.

And O that there were such a Heart in us ! Would we give up the accursed Things that are amongst us, sacrifice the Idols to which we have bowed, slay those Lusts which war against our Souls, and put away the Pollutions that defile our Land, the Heart of God would be towards us again, and we should continue to behold his Glory as usual in the Sanctuary ! Would the Spirit of the Lord raise our Indignation at Sin, and bring us to that Tenderness of Spirit express’d by Returning *Israel*, Jer. iii. 22. *Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God.* We might then hope our

Days

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Days of Mourning would soon be accomplished, and a displeased God be angry with us no more.

The Grounds we have to believe, that such a Preparation to meet an offended God would prevent threatened Punishment, are

(1.) *His Nature.*

This is merciful and gracious, infinitely, and unchangeably kind, and good : Mercy is the darling Attribute of the Almighty ; the Sacred Pages represent this to us in the strongest Light, and describe it in the highest and most lofty Strains of Language ; *It endures for ever, it is from everlasting unto everlasting, it is exceeding abundant above all that we are able to ask, or think.* No Tongue can utter, nor any Heart of Man conceive the Extent of this : What Encouragement is it to penitent Souls to be told, that *God is Love !* His Works and Word abundantly declare this ; behold God in the Gospel of his Grace, behold him in his incarnate Son, remember at what a vast Expence he glorified the milder, and what prodigious Provocation he had to glorify the severer Attribute, and then judge of this Encouragement.

(2.) *The Usage of Providence.*

The Sacred History informs us, that sincere Repentance always meets with great Compassion : *The Princes of Israel and the King humbled themselves, and said, The Lord is righteous ; then came the Word of the Lord to Shemaiah, saying, they have humbled themselves, therefore I will*

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I will not destroy them, 2 Chron. xii. 6, 7.
Whenever rebellious *Israel* came unto their God weeping over their Sins with real Contrition, he sent them away rejoicing: No Instance can be given of a reformed People being utterly undone and ruin'd so far from this, that the Prayers of a few good Souls have often saved a whole Society; had there been ten righteous Men in *Sodom* the City had not been consumed. Repentance and Prayer have sheathed the devouring Sword, quenched the Violence of Fire, pacified the Fury of Heaven, and recalled the Arrows of Death. The Design of Affliction is not to consume, but reform and save.

(3.) *The Relation between God and his People.*

This is very near and intimate, and gives Ground of great Encouragement in Times of Distress and Seasons of Danger; *Are we not thy People?* is a Plea that penetrates into the very Heart of God, every Age and Generation of good People have found That a successful Argument in Prayer, *What wilt thou do to thy great Name.* *The Lord's Portion* (says Moses) *is his People, and Jacob is the Lot of his Inheritance*, Deut. xxxii. 9. The Love of God to his People is rich and free, lasting and unchangeable: He himself sometimes pleads the near Relation there is between them, *Turn O backsliding Children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you.* Astonishing Goodness! What

D God

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God urges upon *Israel*, as a Motive to Repentance, *Israel* may undoubtedly return upon him as a Plea for Mercy; the Love of this Relation beareth all Things, forgiveth all Things.

(4). *His express Promise.*

If my People, which are called by my Name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my Face, and turn from their wicked Ways, then will I hear from Heaven, and forgive their Sins, and heal their Land, 2 Chron. vii. 14. *If we confess our Sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our Sins, and to cleanse us from all Unrighteousness,* 1 John i. 9, These two Places are full to the Purpose, and tho' I mention no more, every one acquainted with the Bible knows that such Promises as these are exceeding many, as well as precious, and stand, and shine every where up and down the sacred Pages. All this then is the loudest Call to deep and speedy Repentance, and the greatest Encouragement to Faith, and Prayer: Thus should his People endeavour to meet their God, and falling before him, may humbly hope the Lord will lift them up. But

2. Suppose Judgment is inevitable, and there be no Door of Escape, how are we then to prepare to meet our God?

It must be own'd that Sin is sometimes at such an Height even among a professing People, that God cannot, consistently with his Justice, and Faithfulness, any longer forbear to punish it. You have an Instance to this Purpose, in the xivth. and xvth. Chapters of *Jeremiah*. The Prophet urges upon

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on God the several Pleas for Mercy with a passionate Importance, O Lord, says he, tho' our Iniquities testify against us, do thou sit for thy Name's Sake, O the Hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in Time of Trouble! Why shouldest thou be as a Stranger in the Land? Again, Do not abhor us for thy Name's Sake, do not disgrace the Throne of thy Glory. But all would not do; the Answer was, Tho' Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my Mind could not be towards this People, cast them out of my Sight, and let them go forth, such as are for Death, to Death; such as are for the Sword, to the Sword; such as are for the Famine, to the Famine; and such as are for the Captivity, to the Captivity.

If this should come to be our Case, we must yet prepare to meet our God, and in Order to do it with Comfort, let us,

i. Consider well the Ways of God, and deliberate in our own Minds about the Conduct of Providence.

God is not only an absolute Sovereign, whose will is irresistible, but he is a wise, and good Being, all whose Ways are Mercy and Truth; he has his own Glory always in View, and his Peoples best Good: There is a Beauty and Harmony in all his Works, God never acts unbecoming himself, never does a Thing inconsistent with his Honour, or takes one single Step amiss; his judicial Proceedings are guided with unerring Wisdom, and there is nothing partial, or arbitrary in any of his Dispensations; here therefore let his

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People recollect themselves, and consider the equity, and Wisdom of Providence. We may not know what God is about to do, what special Ends he has in his Eye, or what secret Purpose he is effecting, but inasmuch, as we are sure, his Ways are equal, his Conduct regular, and steady, and his Love to his People sure, and unchangeable, we should desire that he would take his own Way, to glorify his own Attributes, to bring about his own Designs, and to destroy his Enemies, either in our Souls, or in the World. Should his Judgments invade the Earth, it shall however go well with the Righteous, God will either hide such by his Providence, 'till Death has finish'd its Triumphs, or he will take them away from the Evil to come, and it is much the same to the Godly whether they are delivered from Death, or delivered by it. The *Psalmist* represents the Church joyful and triumphant, while the severest Judgments are threatned and inflicted; *A Fire goeth before him, the Earth trembled, and the Hills also melted like Wax, at the Presence of the Lord, but Zion heard and was glad, the Daughters of Judah rejoiced, because of thy judgments, O Lord,* Psal. xcviij.

2. *We should resign to his Will.*
And this not merely out of Necessity, but Choice, not only because it is an irresistible, but a wise and holy Will. The Sovereignty of God is enough to silence us, but his Wisdom and Love will quiet and satisfy his People in all his Conduct. When *Aaren saw his Sons devour'd by*

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Fire from the Lord he was told, by *Moses*, *That the Lord will be sanctified in them that come nigh him, and before all the People he will be glorified*; and hercupon it is said, *Aaron held his Peace*, he uttered not one complaining Word, his Carriage intimates Acquiescence as well as Submission, to *Eli* when *Samuel* delivered that dreadful Message, that God would judge his House forever, makes this wise, and proper Answer, *it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him Good*, *1 Sam. iii. 18.* And to a Greater than Both, *Father glorify thy Name*. This is a Direction to good People how to meet divine Judgments; let every such Person resign himself to the Will of God, “Here I am, Great God, “do with thy Servant as seems Thee good, I am “a self judged, and a self condemned Creature, “but I lye at the Foot of God, I know not what “it will please the Lord to do with me, thy “Judgments are gone forth into the Earth, and “may shortly reach to me, if thou sendest Trouble, who shall give Peace, if I survive approaching Calamity, I will own distinguishing Mercy, but if I perish, I perish; let God take his own Way with me, if Life be spar'd, I'll own the Hand that saves me, but if I am appointed to Death, I will dye as I have liv'd, upon my Knees, making Supplication unto my Judge. And now Lord, my Heart is fixed, I am ready with Reverence, and Humility to meet my Fate, go I must sooner or later, I can dye but once, O may it be a Passage to eternal Life and Blessedness, and then welcome the Will of God!

26 A FAST SERMON.

3. We should be careful to be found of God in Peace.

In a Time of general Distress, who would not wish his Conscience peaceful, and his Spirit calm and easy! How unhappy is he whom Affliction finds perplex'd with worldly Cares, ruffl'd with ungodly Passions or distress'd with prevailing Sin! A discomposed Spirit is most unsuitable to such a Juncture as this; let us labour therefore after that Peace with God, and with our own Consciences which is the Purchase of a Redeemer's Death, and the Fruit of the blessed Spirit; especially, let this unite the Hearts of Good Men in the Love of God, and of one another, is this a Time for Brethren to fall out? Are we contending with one another at a Season which requires us All to be striving together in Prayer to God? Will neither civil nor sacred Interests compose our Differences, and reinflame our Charity? Is this a Time for Alteration and Strife, for Wrangling and Debate, for Jealousy and Distance? It is an odious Thing for Brethren to be Accusers one of another at any Time, but in one of common Calamity, it is visibly a sore Judgment. O my God may I be found of thee in Peace! Surely it is more than Time, for the Servants of Christ to lay aside their Differences, and unite their Endeavours to prepare the Lord's People for what is before them in the Womb of his Providence. If a Day of Prosperity has made us wanton, one of Adversity should make us considerate; who wou'd not wish to dye in Peace, rather than live in the Fire of Contention! How uncomfortable must it

be, to bear Witness against the Perverseness of good Men! How uncomfortable to perceive a Tinder in our Spirits, apt to kindle by every Spark of unhallowed Fire that happens to be struck into them? A suspicious, uncharitable, contentious Spirit, I should think is neither fit to live, nor to dye withal *

4. *We should examine, and clear up our Evidences for Heaven.*

Now is a proper Time to enquire into the Reality and Glory of that State, our own Title to, and Interest in, it, and how far we are meet to be Partakers of this Inheritance. Let us go over the Grounds of our Hope afresh, and search and try our Heart and Way. O let it not be a doubtful Thing with us, whether we believe in Christ, and are savingly united to him by a divine Faith; whether we belong to God, and are accepted by him thro' the Beloved, to the Praise of the Glory of his Grace; whether we are translated out of the Kingdom of Darkness into that of God's dear Son, or are still in the Gall of Bitterness, and Bond of Iniquity! Have we been persuaded, and enabled to yield our selves unto God? Do we serve the Lord Christ? Are we the Workmanship of the divine Spirit, and is He carrying on a Work of progressive Sanctification in our Souls? Have we a comfortable Hope that thro' the infinite Mercy of God, and the infinite Merit of Jesus Christ, it shall go well with our Souls forever? And are we able to render a Reason of this Hope, with Meekness and Fear? If so, we are in a good Posture to meet approaching Judg-

* See Dr. Calamy's Sermon on Truth and Love, lately printed for J. Clark.
ment.

28 A FAST SERMON.

ment. A Man who is fit to dye, and meet for Heaven, has nothing to fear, unless it be to live, and be unfit again. Death is such a One's *Quietus*, and should it make ever so speedy an Approach, or the Form of its Appearance be somewhat frightful and startling, all that will soon be over: A well disposed, well prepared Christian may not only stand firm, and safe, when God approaches to correct his Church, but may stand upon the Ruins of a confounding World, in the Prospect of a glorious Immortality, and in the Virtue of that Word of God which liveth, and abideth forever.

This is what I take to be the especial Duty of the present Time: I will now conclude, by calling upon all good Men, to shew their Love to their Country, their Duty to the Best of KINGS, and their affectionate Concern for the Protestant Religion, and the Liberties of *England* in this critical Juncture, by doing their utmost to prevent what our Sins but too justly deserve: And who knows what such a Day as this may produce? Perhaps, a Stop may be put to the Terrors of the Lord, the Judgments we feel may remove, and those we fear be kept at a Distance from us: - Or, it may be, that a common Calamity may unite, reform, and refine us, and if it should be so, that *God comes with Fire, and his Chariots as a Whirlwind, to render his Anger with Fury, and his Rebukes with Flames of Fire; yet blessed are they that know his Name, that Name which is as a strong Tower, unto which the Righteous flee, and are safe.*

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